

Is the Modern Prophetic Movement Duplicating These Ancient Heresies?

The focus of this article is that, in my opinion, the modern prophetic movement has often repeated the heresies of the early Montanist movement.

What Was Montanism?

Montanism was a Christian movement that emerged in the second century, around the middle of the second century A.D, in Phrygia, a region in modern-day Turkey. It is named after its founder, Montanus. Montanism is often described as a heretical movement by mainstream Christianity because it diverged from the beliefs and practices of the early Christian communities in significant ways.

Montanus and his followers, including two women named Prisca (or Priscilla) and Maximilla, claimed to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and to receive new prophetic revelations. Montanists considered these revelations to be authoritative and on par with or even surpassing the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

The movement was controversial because it challenged the ecclesiastical authority and hierarchy of the church by suggesting that the prophecy and direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit could supersede the established church leadership and teachings. This led to tension and conflict with the mainstream Christian church, which saw the movement's new revelations and the authority of its prophets as a threat to the unity and doctrinal stability of the church. Montanists also emphasized the imminent return of Christ and the establishment of the New Jerusalem in Phrygia.

Eventually, several regional church synods and notable church fathers condemned the movement as heretical.

The Response of Early Church Fathers to Montanism

Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome were among the early Christian writers who spoke against Montanism. Their critiques focused on various aspects of Montanism.

Eusebius of Caesarea: Eusebius, a church historian writing in the early fourth century, provides one of the most detailed contemporary accounts of Montanism in his work "Ecclesiastical History." Eusebius criticized Montanism on several fronts:

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- **False prophecy.** Eusebius challenged the Montanist claim to prophetic inspiration, suggesting that the prophecies of Montanus and his followers were not in line with Christian doctrine and were therefore false.

- **Disruption of church order.** He was concerned about the disruption Montanism caused within the church's established order, particularly criticizing its challenge to ecclesiastical authority and hierarchy.

- **Emotional excess.** The historian described the ecstatic utterances of Montanist prophets in terms that suggested he found them unseemly and not in keeping with the sober, controlled worship he associated with true Christianity.

Jerome: Jerome, writing in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, also criticized Montanism.

- **Critique of Montanist practices.** Jerome was particularly critical of Montanism's challenge to the authority of the church's hierarchy, which was seen as apostolically founded. The Montanists relied on new prophecies to undermine the established Christian Scriptures and teachings.

– **Challenge to apostolic authority.**

– **Association with schism.** Jerome often associated Montanism with schism and division within the church, emphasizing the importance of unity and adherence to orthodox teaching above prophetic utterances.

Hence, Eusebius, Jerome and many others viewed Montanism as a dangerous departure from orthodox Christian beliefs and practices.

Contemporary Examples of Montanism in the Charismatic Church

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1. People declare they are speaking directly from God regarding important local church or national issues without first submitting their word to mature, recognized leaders in the church (1 Cor. 14:29-33). Rogue social media prophets especially fit this point.
2. So-called prophets give words that do not ultimately bring glory to Christ but point to themselves. First Corinthians 12:3 teaches us that anything inspired by the Holy Spirit says, "Jesus is Lord," but it does not cause people to gravitate to a ministry or a prophet. All prophecies should be Christocentric, either directly or indirectly, according to Revelation 19:7.
3. They give directional prophetic words that subvert ecclesiastical authority in the local church. All prophecy should be submitted to local church leaders according to 1 Corinthians 14:29. Rogue prophets usually disrespect, subvert or bypass the pastoral authority in the local church.
4. They utilize their prophetic gift to draw disciples after themselves. Paul warned about those who draw disciples away from their church (Acts 20:30). Hence,

prophets should point people to their biblically based local church rather than poaching them.

5. They act as direct mediators between God and the church. Scripture teaches in 1 Timothy 2:15 that there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 teaches that in the past, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, God has spoken to us in His Son. Hence, the true nature of prophecy in the New Covenant primarily involves reflecting the person and message of Jesus pastorally to Christ's followers for edification (1 Cor. 14:4)
6. Prophets declare themselves as God's direct mouthpiece. Too many of these so-called prophets glibly use phrases such as, "Thus says the Lord" (which causes people to be afraid of judging their words since they say they speak for God Himself). Prophetic leaders should say things such as "I believe God is saying this" or "I believe the Lord has laid this on my heart."
7. They sometimes elevate their prophetic words as equal to or above the closed canon of Scripture. For instance, when these so-called prophets say unequivocally, "Thus says the Lord," many people equate that phrase with inspired Scripture, violating serious biblical principles (Prov. 30:5-6, Rev. 22:18-19).
8. They share extra-biblical revelations that can potentially impact the doctrines of the church. I've heard of numerous prophetic people saying they have had dreams or direct communion with departed saints who give them insights from the Word of God, which could potentially alter the view of historic Christian doctrine.
9. They are frequently predicting end-time events based on so-called prophetic words. Often, when there is a global crisis, somebody's writing a book or sharing a dream about an event being a sign of the soon coming of the Lord (similar to the focus of the Montanus movement).
10. These prophets intentionally prophesy for monetary gain.

Many prophesy over wealthy people to extract financial support. This is an inverted form of the sin of "simony," in which Simon Magus attempted to purchase the gift of God for money (Acts 8:18-20). The Montanists also endeavored to utilize their prophetic gift to obtain influence and power, resulting in an attempt to establish the New Jerusalem in the village of Pepuza in Phrygia.

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Dr. Joseph Mattera is an internationally known author, consultant and theologian whose mission is to influence leaders who influence culture. He is the founding pastor of Resurrection Church and leads several organizations, including the U.S. Coalition of Apostolic Leaders and Christ Covenant Coalition.